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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a case study that sought to trace the faculty's efforts to develop a system of shared governance for the College of Education at Mississippi State University. Data were collected by participants in the process and included written guidelines, agenda for meetings, minutes of meetings, notes, memoranda, letters, and reports. It was found that from 1989 through 1995, the college's Faculty Advisory Committee was relatively inactive. Beginning in 1996, however, the faculty put forth a set of guidelines that sought to increase the role of faculty in governance. A 15-member faculty council was created in 1996 and met monthly to address such issues as elected vs. appointed department heads, resource allocations among departments, the role of the dean within the college, and the conduct of a faculty survey. The results of these meetings, as well as the council's 1997-98 agenda, are discussed in light of the increased interest in the governance of the college on the part of the faculty. (MDM)

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ESTABLISHING FACULTY GOVERNANCE AT A COLLEGE OF EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY

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This qualitative case study traces the faculty's effort to develop a system of shared governance for the College of Education at Mississippi State University. In academic organizations, governance generally refers to policy development and decision making (Lee, 1979). Since there is little agreement as to what a "shared governance" model should look like and how it should be defined, discussion of this concept often results in controversy and misunderstanding between faculty and administrators. The faculty's role in governance at institutions of higher education is an issue clouded by the political and economic events that have taken place in academe during the past decade (Gerber, 1997).

According to Schuster (1991), the issue of faculty involvement in the decision-making process in relation to governance has concerned faculty members on university campuses for many years. Contending that faculty involvement in the decision-making process in institutions of higher education is an important indicator of a strong, positive university environment, Wolvin (1991) states, "A great university is governed through active, informed participation by all constituents--faculty, administrators, and staff. Ultimately the institution is only as strong as its faculty is strong" (p. 26).

Faculties in colleges of education must help build a governance structure which will be mutually satisfying for addressing the problems that Ramo (1997) believes have intensified in higher education due to constant criticisms in the public press that "higher education is a dinosaur whose personnel and governance structures and practices are ill-equipped to accommodate the need for flexibility and rapid responses to changing conditions in the social, technological, economic, and political environments" (p. 38). Shared governance works best when the faculty is informed, active,

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and engaged in dialogue about what to do about the issues facing higher education.

As the 21st century rapidly approaches, faculties must recognize that deans and their administrative staffs cannot unilaterally resolve the complex and interrelated issues confronting colleges of education. Deans simply do not have the resources to handle such a welter of problems. If colleges of education are to function effectively in the coming millennium, multifaceted collaborative efforts involving faculty in policy development and decision making need to be launched.

Faculty councils provide effective mechanisms for sharing governance at the college level in large universities. Faculty councils are important to colleges of education because they have potential to:

1. Determine short- and long-range interests and needs of faculty.
2. Articulate expectations of faculty, staff, and students.
3. Develop goals and planning strategies.
4. Establish standards and procedures for the review and evaluation of proposed administrative action dealing with curricula offerings, budgetary practices, and faculty recruitment and retention.
5. Increase knowledge and understanding of issues among departments and units.
6. Equitably allocate resources.

Realizing the potential of faculty councils, however, is no easy matter. Faculty councils will govern well if their members demand healthy debate, dialogue, and arrive at consensus about the purposes of the college. Defining its role, its constituencies, its assessment procedures, and its relationship to the dean are all critical elements to a faculty council's functioning.

If colleges of education are to successfully meet the challenges of the 21st century, faculties must be invited to share in governance. Since no

single group can set priorities for a complex organizational structure such as a college of education, deans and faculties must work together in mutual respect and openness.

Research Methodology

This study traced the emergence of faculty governance at Mississippi State University's College of Education from within the movement. As researchers, we were "complete participants" in the process. We studied a setting in which we were members and personally witnessed the events as they happened (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996).

Data were collected through direct observation and the analysis of primary source documents such as written guidelines, agenda for meetings, minutes of meetings, notes, memoranda, letters, and reports. Documents examined included handwritten and typed material, material prepared for the public record, and material intended only for private use.

Faculty Governance: An Evolutionary Process

From 1989 to 1995, the Faculty Advisory Committee (College of Education Handbook, 1995) was one of many standing committees created by the administration of the College of Education at Mississippi State University. The committee, whose chief purpose was to advise the dean, rarely met. During the 1993-94 academic year, however, an unusual situation occurred. When asked to screen faculty member applicants for alumni awards, the committee declined the charge. Declining the charge to screen faculty awards marked a significant change in attitude among committee members. From that point forward, the committee set its own agenda and worked toward establishing procedures leading to shared governance. In the spring of 1996, faculty governance guidelines

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were submitted to the faculty of the College of Education for a vote. The guidelines were approved and the Faculty Council, one of the major outcomes produced by the guidelines, came into existence.

The governance guidelines were put into practice during the 1996-97 academic year. Excerpts from the guidelines, information about the council, meeting highlights, and notable other events follow.

Faculty Governance Guidelines

Guidelines defining the composition of the faculty of the College of Education and the faculty's role in college governance were approved by a vote of the faculty during the 1996 spring semester. Approximately 45 percent of the faculty voted (38 yes and 7 no) and the guidelines became operational on August 15, 1996. The guidelines covered composition of the faculty, voting eligibility, identification of officers, meetings, and functions. Selected excerpts from the guidelines are as follows:

> The College of Education (COE) Faculty shall consist of all resident professionals of the College who hold the rank of professor, associate professor, assistant professor, instructor, senior research scientist, research scientist II, research scientist I, research scientist, research assistant, and such other ranks as recommended by the Faculty Council and approved by the COE Faculty.
>
> All the members of the COE Faculty may vote on all matters put before the faculty.
>
> The Dean of the College of Education shall preside at COE faculty meetings.
>
> The Faculty shall meet twice a year within 60 days after completion of registration of spring and fall semesters and at other times upon call of the Dean or of the COE Faculty Council or by petition of 25 percent of the COE Faculty. A quorum shall consist of 35 members of the COE Faculty who are present and eligible to vote.
>
> The general purpose of the COE Faculty is to participate in an advisory role in the governance of the college. The COE Faculty shall consider all matters referred to it by the Dean or the Faculty Council or individual faculty members and make recommendations concerning them at its discretion.

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Creation of the Faculty Council was an important outcome of the guidelines. According to the guidelines, the "COE Faculty shall function individually or collectively to recommend and refer to the Council those matters dealing with the academic community and welfare of the College which it would desire to have the Council consider."

Faculty Council

The Faculty Council (College of Education Handbook, 1996) emerged as an approach to shared governance from what was previously an advisory committee which was given relatively low-level tasks such as suggesting faculty members for awards or serving in the role of window dressing for accreditation purposes. Shunning its ancestral heritage and capitalizing on the need for shared responsibility in governance, the council moved rapidly to become a viable mechanism for facilitating communication and cooperation between faculty and the administration.

The major purpose of the COE Faculty Council is to represent the faculty in advising the Dean on matters directly related to the College in fulfillment of its mission. Specifically, the Council shall:

1. Serve as a forum on matters pertaining to the role and mission of the College.
2. Seek to be representative of the interests, needs, and views of the COE Faculty in general.
3. Consider all matters brought before it and make recommendations to the Dean concerning them.

Fifteen members representing the college's academic departments and research units comprise the Faculty Council. Members are elected for terms of two years. Council officers consist of a chair, vice Chair, and secretary.

The Faculty Council is expected to hold monthly meetings and hold special meetings upon call of the chair or petition of eight members. For conducting business, a quorum shall consist of eight members present and eligible to vote. In addition, the dean is expected to provide an appropriation of funds and resources sufficient to allow the Faculty Council to perform its functions. It should be noted that to date the council is not a line item in the dean's budget although he does furnish the council with supplies and staff assistance (e.g., copying materials) upon request.

Highlights from Faculty Council Meetings

Selected highlights concerning Faculty Council meetings from August 1996 through October 1997 are as follows:

Elected Jack Blendinger, chair; Vince McGrath, vice chair; and Benita Cahalane, secretary (August 28, 1996).

Addressed the issue of elected department chairs vs. appointed heads and decided to canvass the faculty on the issue (August 28, 1996).

Appointed a committee to study the matter of resource allocations to departments and programs (August 28, 1996).

Approved a ballot for canvassing faculty by departments concerning the issue of elected department chairs vs. appointed department heads (September 25, 1996).

Appointed committee to study resource allocations to departments and programs reported to the Council (September 25, 1996).

Results of canvassing faculty by departments concerning the issue of elected department chairs vs. appointed department heads were discussed (October 23, 1996).

Committee charged with studying resource allocations to departments and programs reported to the Council (December 4, 1996).

Committee appointed to develop a faculty recognition program (January 29, 1997).

Request from the Department of Technology and Education concerning FC's involvement in the revision of the *COE Promotion and Tenure Guidelines* (January 29, 1997).

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Discussion concerning the relationship of the Dean of the College of Education to the Faculty Council (January 29, 1997).

Discussion pertaining to revision of governance guidelines for the College of Education (January 29, 1997).

Discussion about canvassing COE faculty by departments regarding the issue of elected department chairs vs. appointed heads. Departments were evenly divided on the the issue of whether they prefer to keep the present administrative design of appointed (by the dean) department heads or move to an elected department chair system (elected by the faculty of a department). Two departments wanted to keep the present system, two departments were evenly divided, and two departments wanted to go to elected chairs (January 29, 1997).

Analysis of present job descriptions for department heads (January 29, 1997).

Report from the committee appointed to develop a faculty recognition program (March 19, 1997).

Questionnaire drafted for canvassing COE faculty by departments regarding the issue of elected department chairs vs. appointed heads (March 19, 1997).

Continued discussion regarding resource allocations to departments and programs (March 19, 1997)

Preparation of agenda for the COE Faculty Meeting scheduled for May 2, 1997 (April 23, 1997).

Update regarding Faculty Council questionnaire (April 23, 1997).

Request from the dean for the Faculty Council to review and rank FY98 E&G fund requests (April 23, 1997).

Update on faculty retreats and restructuring of the college (April 23, 1997).

Discussion of Council goals for 1997-98 academic year (September 23, 1997)

Design approved for a Faculty Council newsletter to be sent periodically to faculty for information purposes (October 22, 1997).

Closure on goals for the 1997-98 academic year (October 22, 1997).

Faculty Survey

The Faculty Council surveyed the faculty during the month of April 1997. The purpose of the survey was to solicit faculty views concerning changes in the college's name, faculty governance guidelines, and department head

criteria. Sixty-five faculty members responded to the survey and the results were as follows:

1. Should the college's name be changed to the *College of Education and Human Development*?

   Yes 34% No 48% Uncertain 18%

2. Should faculty guidelines be changed from "The Dean of the College of Education shall chair general (COE) faculty meetings" to "The Chair of the Faculty Council shall chair general (COE) faculty meetings?"

   Change 50% Don't change 39% Uncertain 11%

3. Should faculty guidelines be changed from "Each member of the (Faculty) Council shall serve a period of two years" to serving three years starting with the 1998 elections?

   Change 32% Don't change 55% Uncertain 13%

4. Should the term for Council officers be changed from one year to two years?

   Change 63% Don't change 30% Uncertain 7%

5. What type of department head/chair system do you prefer?

   Stay with appointed department heads 30%

   Move to elected department chairs 30%

   Leave it to the discretion of each department to make its own decision regarding appointed department heads or elected department chairs 40%

6. Should the word "head" be changed to "chair" regardless of whether or not the position of department administrator is appointed or elected?

   Yes 38% No 32% Uncertain 30%

7. Regardless of whether the position is appointed or elected, what length of terms do you favor for department administrators?

   One year 18% Two years 26% Three Years 56%

Information gathered by the survey was given to the college restructuring committee.

General Faculty Meetings

The first general faculty meeting as called for in the guidelines for faculty governance was held May 2, 1997. Although the meeting was held on a Friday afternoon at 2:00 p.m., over 100 faculty members (approximately 99%) attended. Information presented and discussed at the meeting included results of the faculty retreats, steps proposed for restructuring the college, an update on NCATE, and the results of the faculty survey.

The second general faculty meeting as called for in the guidelines for faculty governance was held August 22, 1997. Although the meeting was again held on a Friday afternoon at 3:00 p.m., over 100 faculty members (approximately 99%) attended. Information presented and discussed at the meeting included the Faculty Council's goals for the 1997-98 academic year and the dean's plans for restructuring the college.

Involvement in Policy Development

In January of 1997 the Faculty Council became involved in policy development for the College of Education by appointing an ad hoc committee to work with one of the college's associate dean to develop a planning, policy and procedures manual for the college. Three council members comprise the committee.

Promotion and Tenure Guidelines

One of the important items of business addressed by the Faculty Council involved wanting to review Promotion and Tenure guidelines. The Council's involvement started in January of 1997 in response to a request made by the Department of Technology and Education faculty, the Faculty Council asked for the opportunity to read and discuss any revisions of the present COE

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Promotion and Tenure Guidelines. The reason for doing so was based on the council's interest in issues affecting the general welfare of the faculty.

Because the Dean and the Promotion and Tenure Committee could not come to agreement on the revisions, the Council again intervened in the process. A Council memorandum written to the chair of the committee on October 17, 1997 stated:

> Please be informed that the Faculty Council would appreciate being given the opportunity to study any proposed revisions of the COE Promotion and Tenure Guidelines presently in use for the purpose of taking a position favoring or not favoring the changes. We wish to see the revisions prior to them being sent to the faculty for a vote.

As the text cited from the memorandum clearly indicates, the Council's position moved from one of simply making suggestions to one of recommending whether or not faculty members vote in favor of any proposed changes.

Clarification of the Dean's Role

In January of 1997, a clarification of the dean's role in relation to council meetings was made. The clarification calls for the chair of the Faculty Council to meet with the dean a few days prior to a scheduled meeting to review the tentative agenda and discuss what items he would like to be present for during the meeting. The rationale for coming to this decision was based on the premise that members can more freely discuss sensitive issues, if the dean is not present, prior to making a recommendation.

Faculty Council's Role in Budget Allocations

In a special meeting held April 28, 1997 at the request of the dean, the Faculty Council considered department presentations regarding the part of the budget allocation process referred to as the 10% quality allocation. Council members were concerned, however, that the dean was unable to identify new

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monies and the 10% quality portion would come from the departments present funding. After hearing presentations made by department heads, members were in unanimous agreement that all the college's programs demonstrated high quality and no reductions should be made in any department's 1996-97 funding allocations for travel and subsistence, contractual services, commodities, and equipment. The dean's "quality idea" was put put on hold until 1998-99.

Council's Goals for the 1997-98 Academic Year

To guide their work for the 1997-98 academic year, the Faculty Council establish four goals:

1. To review the 1997-98 Budget for the College of Education for the purpose of determining a fair formula for allocating FY 1998-99 resources (e.g., faculty travel monies) in relation to department and unit concerns and needs.

2. To study proposed promotion and tenure guidelines for the purpose of recommending or not recommending their endorsement by the general faculty.

3. To review the College's required undergraduate and graduate core courses of study, especially in relation to curriculum congruence and instructional quality.

4. To shape the College of Education's organizational culture through establishing displays recognizing and celebrating faculty accomplishments (e.g., books published).

Establishing written work goals represented another major shift in the evolutionary development of the fledgling council.

Implications of the Study

As the section pertaining to the historical evolution of faculty governance at MSU's College of Education indicates, it has been a slow, steady process. From a genesis of dissatisfaction among faculty serving on an advisory committee with little purpose, came the desire to share in the governance of the college. This desire manifested itself in a set of faculty

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approved guidelines defining what the concept "general faculty" meant and the establishment of the Faculty Council to represent faculty in the matter of governance.

Our personal experience indicates that faculty interest in sharing in the governance process is high. As the historical record shows, we believe that moving toward shared governance should be done slowly and carefully. The general faulty through its representative council has moved from putting governance guidelines into practice to addressing important issues such as promotion and tenure.

From a position of "Okay, we're into faulty governance, but what do we do," Faculty Council members have progressed to *planning our work and working our plan*. To keep ourselves from becoming distracted with emerging concerns, we have formulated goals to guide our work: to become a major player in the decision-making process, we have turned our attention to the budget; and to better communicate with faculty, we have initiated a newsletter.

If colleges of education are to effectively involve faculty in policy development and sharing in decisions, more actual anecdotal cases of faculty councils at work are needed in order to develop an authentic literature base addressing faculty governance. We believe our study makes a meaningful contribution to establishing such a literature base.

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